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POEMS
SCOTS AND ENGLISH

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BY
JOHN BUCHAN

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SINCE there are many variants of our northern speech, it seems fitting to say that the Scots pieces in this little collection are written in the vernacular which is spoken in the hill country of the Lowlands, from the Cheviots to Galloway. Scots has never been to me a book-tongue; I could always speak it more easily than I could write it; and I dare to hope that the faults of my verses, great as they are, are not those of an antiquarian exercise.

J. B.

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BOOK I
SCOTS

*Midian's Evil Day*¹

(From Alexander Cargill, Elder of the Kirk of the Remnant in the vale of Wae, to the Reverend Murdo Mucklethraw, Minister of the aforesaid Kirk, anent the Great Case recently argued in the House of Lords.)

DEAR Reverend Sir,—I tak my pen
To tell yon great occasion when
We garred our licht shine afore men,
Yea, far and wide,
And smote the oppressor but and ben
For a' his pride.

¹ The occasion of these verses requires a note. The union in 1900 of the Free Church of Scotland and the United Presbyterian Church led to the secession of certain congregations of the former, who called themselves the Free Church, and maintained that the union involved a departure from the principles of that church and a breach of the conditions under which certain properties were held. They brought an action to establish their right to these properties, as the sole remaining repository of Free Church principles. This action was decided against the claimants in the Scottish courts, but, on appeal, the House of Lords, under the guidance of Lord Halsbury (then Lord Chancellor), reversed the decision.

Yoursel', ye mind, was far frae weel—
A cauld ye catch't at Kippenshiel,
Forbye rheumatics in your heel—

And thus it came,
Fou though ye were o' holy zeal,
Ye stopped at hame.

For me, my lambin'-time was bye,
The muirland hay was nane sae high,
The men were thrang, the grund was dry,
Sae when ye spak,
And bade me gang and testify,
I heldna back.

Wi' dowie hert I left that morn,
Reflectin' on the waefu' scorn
The Kirk maun thole, her courts forlorn,
Her pillars broke,
While Amalek exalts his horn,
And fills his poke.

I pondered the mischances sair
The Lord had garred puir Scotland bear
Frae English folk baith late and ear'
Sin' Flodden year
To the twae beasts at Carlisle fair
I bocht ower dear.

If true religion got a fa'
Frae her auld courts and guid Scots law,
What hope o' succour far awa'
 'Mang godless chielis,
Whae at the Word sae crouesly craw
 And fling their heels.

As weel expect the Gospel sap 'ill
Rise in uncovenantit thrapple
As saw a ploom to raise an apple,
 Or think a soo
Fleein' aloft on the hoose-tap 'ill
 Sit like a doo.

I like an owl in desert was,
When to the coorts I buid to pass,
Amang the crood to hear the Cause.
 Nae freend I saw,—
Juist some auld lads set oot in raws
 And belchin' law.

But ane sat cockit in atween,
A wee man but as gleg's a preen :
A walth o' sense was in his een
 And foreheid massy.
“ The Chancellor,” I was tellt, when keen
 I speired whae was he.

Wi' prayerfu' mind I watched the stert
While Maister Johnston¹ played his pairt,
And sune I fand my anxious hert
 Gie a great loup.

" Yon Chancellor the ungodly's cairt,"
 I said, " will coup."

O sir, that day I kent indeed
There's men o' worth across the Tweed,
Men whae are steadfast in the creed
 As Moses sel',
Men whae the Word o' God can read
 And cling to Hell.

I thocht they were a careless race,
Decked oot in cauld Erastian claes,
Whae traivelled a' in slippery ways,
 Whase thochts were vain :
But noo I ken they've gifts and grace
 E'en like oor ain.

A Lowden chiel²—black be his tryst !—
A wise-like man, but ill advised,
Led on the hosts o' Antichrist.
 And threepit bauld,
That man could never back be wysed
 To Calvin's fauld.

¹ Mr Henry Johnston, K.C., of the Scots Bar (afterwards Lord Johnston), led for the appellants.

² The leading counsel for the respondents was Mr R. B. Haldane (M.P. for East Lothian), afterwards Lord Chancellor of England.

He made the yett o' Heaven sae wide
The veriest stirk could get inside :
Puffed up he was wi' warldly pride
 And fou o' German,
Quotin' auld pagans for his guide
 And sic-like vermin.

He feucht wi' Prophets, jouked wi' Psalms,
He got his legs clean ower the trams,
He garred th' Apostles skip like rams
 To dae his biddin's :
Oor auld Confessions were but shams,
 Their loss guid riddance.

" God foreordained some men to Hell—
Granted, but man can please himself'
Up to a point—and if I dwell
 Mair on free-will
Than on election, I do well,
 A Christian still.

" For these are mysteries," quo' he,
" Whereon nae twae men can agree,
And sae it's richt for you and me—
 The thing's sae kittle—
Ane to consider half a lee,—
 Whilk—maitters little.

" It's a'," he said, " confüision wild ;
In siccán things the best's a child ;
Some walk an ell and some a mile ;

 But never fear,
Thae doots will a' be reconciled
 In higher sphere.

" Therefore a kirk, whase lamps are bright,
Bequeathed by auld divines o' might,
Can fling them tapsalteerie quite,
 And think nae shame ;
For white is black and black is white,
 It's a' the same."

But what availed his carnal lear
Against a man o' faith and prayer ?
As through the thistles gangs the share
 And dings them doun,
E'en sae the Chancellor cleft him fair
 Frae heel to croun.

He pinned him wi' the Bible words,
He clove at him wi' Calvin's swirds,
He garred him loup aboot the boards
 Wi' muckle mense,
And bund him wi' the hempen cords
 O' plain guid sense.

" Threep as ye please, it's clear to me,
Whether or no' the twae agree,
Baith doctrines were appoint to be
 The Kirk's chief pillar.
If ane ye like to leave," says he,
 " Ye leave the siller."

Oh, wi' what unction he restored
The auld commandments o' the Lord,
Confoonded Bashan's nowt that roared,
 And 'stablished Hell !
Knox was nae sooner in the Word
 Nor Calvin's sel'.

I'll no' deny yon Lowden chiel
Was gleg as ony slippery eel,
For twae-three men frae Kippenshiel
 Begood to waver ;
I half inclined to doot the Deil
 A' through his claver.

But when a man o' faith and power
Uprose, he couldna bide an hour :
The weakest's doots were tided ower
 Anither towmont.
The Kirk stood firm as auld stane tower
 Wi' safe endowment.

• • • •

I hae a bull, a noble breed,
A shorthorn wi' a massy heid,
Wi' quarters fine and coat o' reid :

On ilka lea

Frae Thurso to the banks o' Tweed
He bears the gree.

I ca'ed him Begg,¹ the same's his sire ;
But noo for sign to a' the shire
O' yon great day when frae the mire
Our feet we bore,
His name shall be in field and byre
“ *The Chancellor.*”

¹ A famous Free Church divine of the old school.

1904

The Herd of Farawa

Who in an April hailstorm discoursed to the traveller on the present discontents.

Pastorum et solis exegit montibus aevum.—VIRGIL.

LOSH, man ! Did ever mortal see
Sic blasts o' snaw ? Ye'll bide a wee,
Afore ye think to cross the lea,
And mount the slack !
Kin'le your pipe, and straucht your knee,
And gie's your crack !

Hoo lang, ye speir ! An unco while !
It's seeventy-sax 'ear came Aprile
That I cam here frae Auchentyle—
A bairn o' nine ;
And mony's the dreich and dreary mile
I've gaed sin' syne.

My folk were herds, sae roond the fauld
Afore I was twae towmonts auld
They fand me snowkin', crouse and bauld
In snaw and seep—
As Dauvid was to kingdoms called,
Sae I to sheep.

I herdit first on Etterick side.
Dod, man, I mind the stound o' pride
Gaed through my hert, when near and wide
 My dowgs I ran.
Though no seeeventeen till Lammastide
 I walked a man.

I got a wife frae Eskdalemuir,
O' dacent herdin' folk, and sair
We wrocht for lang, baith late and 'ear,
 For weans cam fast,
And we were never aucht but puir
 Frae first to last.

Tales I could tell wad gar ye grue
O' snawy lambin's warstled through,
O' drifty days, and win's that blew
 Frae norlan' sky,
And spates that filled the haughlands fou
 And drooned the kye.

But, still and on, the life was fine,
For yon were happier days langsyne ;
For gear to hain, and gear to tine
 I had nae care—
Content I was wi' what was mine,
 And blithe to share.

Sic flocks ye'll never see the day,
Nae fauncy ills to mak ye wae,
Nae fauncy dips wi' stawsome broo,
 Wad fricht the French ;
We wrocht alang the auld guid way,
 And fand it stench.

Nae mawkit kets, nae scabbit een,
But ilka yowe as trig's a preen ;
Sic massy tups as ne'er were seen
 Sin' Job's allowance,
And lambs as thick on ilka green
 As simmer gowans.

Whaur noo ae hirsel jimp can bide
Three hirsels were the countra's pride,
And mony a yaird was wavin' wide,
 And flo'ers were hingin',
Whaur noo is but the bare hillside,
 And linties singin'.

• • • • •

And God ! the men ! Whaur could ye find
Sic hertsome lads, sae crouse and kind ;
Sic skeel o' sheep, sic sarious mind
 At kirk and prayer—
Yet aiblins no to haud or bind
 At Boswells fair ?

Frae Galloway to Aiberdeen
(I mind the days as 'twere yestreen)
I've had my cantrips—Lord a wheen !

 But through them a',
The fear o' God afore my een,
 I keep't the Law.

My nieves weel hoddit in my breekis,
The Law I keep't, and turned baith cheeks
Until the smiter, saft and meek's
 A bairn at schule ;
Syne struck, and laid him bye for weeks
 To learn the fule.

Frae Melrose Cauld to Linkumdoddie,
I'd fecht and drink wi' ony body ;
Was there a couthy lad ? Then, dod, he
 Sune fand his fellow,
What time the tippenny or the toddy
 Had garred us mellow.

Nae wark or ploy e'er saw me shirk ;
I had an airm wad fell a stirk ;
I traivelled ten lang mile to kirk
 In wind and snaw ;
I tell 'e, sir, frae morn to mirk,
 I keep't the Law.

• • • •

Weekly we gat, and never fail,
Screeds marrowy as a pat o' kail,
And awfu' as the Grey Meer's Tail
 In Lammas rain,
And stey and lang as Moffatdale,
 And stieve's a stane.

Nae Gospel sowens fit for weans,
But doctrines teuch as channel-stanes ;
We heard the Word wi' anxious pains,
 Sarious and happy.
And half the week we piked the banes,
 And fand them sappy.

Lang years aneath a man o' God
I sat, my Bible on the brod ;
He wasna feared to lift the rod
 And scaud the errin' ;
He walked whaur our great forbears trod,
 And blest his farin'.

But noo we've got a bairnly breed,
Whase wee-bit shilpit greetin' screed
Soughs like a wast wind ower the heid,
 Lichter than 'oo' ;
Lassies and weans, it suits their need,
 No me and you !

My dochter's servin' in the toun,
She gangs to hear a glaikit loon,
Whae rows his een, and twirls him roun'
 Like ane dementit.

Nae word o' Hell, nae sicht or soun'
 O' sin repentit.

But juist a weary, yammerin' phrase
O' "Saunts" and "Heaven" and "love" and
 "praise,"
Words that a grown man sudna üse,
 God ! sic a scunner !
I had to rise and gang my ways
 To haud my denner.

At halesome fauts they lift their han',
Henceforth, they cry, this new comman',
Bide quate and doucely in the lan'
 And love your brither—
This is the total end o' man,
 This and nae ither.

And that's their creed ! An owercome braw
For folks that kenna fear or fa',
Crouse birds that on their midden craw
 Nor think o' scaith,
That keep the trimmin' o' the Law
 And scorn the pith.

It's no for men that nicht and day
See the Almighty's awesome way,
And ken themselves but ripps o' strae
 Afore His wind,
And, dark or licht, maun watch and pray
 His grace to find.

My forbear, hunkerin' in a hag,
Was martyred by the laird o' Lagg ;
He dee'd afore his heid wad wag
 In God's denial.
D'ye think the folk that rant and brag
 Wad thole yon trial ?

Man, whiles I'd like to gang mysel
And wile auld Clavarse back frae Hell ;
Clavarse, or maybe Tam Dalziel,
 Wad stop their fleechin' ;
I wager yon's the lads to mell
 And mend sic preachin'.

• • • • •

Whaure'er I look I find the same,
The warld's nae gumption in its wame ;
E'en sin' I mind the human frame
 Grows scrimp and shauchled,
O' a' man's warks ye canna name
 Ane that's no bauchled.

There's mawkit sheep and feckless herds,
And poopits fou o' senseless words ;
Instead o' kail we sup on curds,
 And wersh the taste o't ;
To parritch-sticks we've turned our swirds,
 Sae mak' the maist o't.

And poalitics ! I've seen the day
I'd walk ten mile ower burn and brae
To hear some billie hae his say
 About the nation.
Tories and a' their daft-like play
 Fand quick damnation.

I thocht—for I was young—that folk
Were a' the same ; I scorned the yoke
O' cless or gear ; wi' pigs in poke
 I took nae han'.
I daured the hale wide warld to choke
 The richts o' man.

It's still my creed, but hech ! sin' then
We've got the richts and lost the men ;
We've got a walth o' gear to spen'
 And nane to spend it ;
The warld is waitin' ripe to men',
 And nane to mend it.

Our maisters are a flock o' daws,
Led on by twae-three hoodie-craws ;
They weir our siller, mak' our laws,
 And God ! sic makin' !
And we sit roun' wi' lood applause,
 And cheer their crakin'.

We're great ; but daur we lift a nieve
Wi'oot our neebors grant their leave ?
We're free, folk say, to speak, believe,
 Dae what we wull—
And what's oor gain ? A din to deave
 A yearlin' bull !

• • • • •

A dwaibly warld ! I'll no deny
There's orra blessin's. I can buy
My baccy cheap, and feed as high
 For half the siller ;
For saxpence ony man can lie
 As fou's the miller.

A bawbee buys a walth o' prent,
And every gowk's in Paurliaiment ;
The warld's reformed—but sir, tak tent,
 For a' their threep,
There's twae things noo that arena kent—
 That's MEN and SHEEP.

1907

The Eternal Feminine

WHEN I was a freckled bit bairn
And cam in frae my ploys to the fire,
Wi' my buits a' clamjamphried wi' shairn
And my jaicket a' glaury wi' mire,
I got gloomin' and glunchin' and paiks,
And nae bite frae the press or the pan,
And my auld grannie said as she skelped me to bed,
“ Hech, sirs, what a burden is man ! ”

When I was a lang-leggit lad,
At waddin's and kirns a gey chield,
I hae happit a lass in my maud
And gone cauldrife that she micht hae bield,
And convoyed her bye bogles and stirks,
A kiss at the hindmost my plan ;
But a' that I fand was the wecht o' her hand,
And “ Hech, sirs, what a burden is man ! ”

When Ailie and me were made yin
We set up in a canty bit cot ;
Sair wrocht we day oot and day in,
We were unco content wi' oor lot.

But whiles wi' a neebor I'd tak
A gless that my heid couldna stan' ;
Syne she'd greet for a week, and nae word wad she speak
But " Hech, sirs, what a burden is man ! "

She dee'd, and my dochter and me
For the lave wi' ilk ither maun shift.
Nae tentier lass could ye see ;
The wooers cam doun like a drift ;
But sune wi' an unco blae glower
Frae the doorstep they rade and they ran,
And she'd sigh to hersel', as she gae'd to the well,
" Hech, sirs, what a burden is man ! "

She's mairrit by noo and she's got
A white-heided lass o' her ain.
White-heided mysel, as I stot
Roond the doors o' her shouther I'm fain.
What think ye that wean said yestreen ?
I'll tell ye, believe't if ye can ;
She primmed up her mou' and said saft as a doo,
" Hech, sirs, what a burden is man ! "

The South Countrie

I NEVER likit the Kingdom o' Fife—
Its kail's as cauld as its wind and rain,
And the folk that bide benorth o' the Clyde
They speak a langwidge that's no my ain.
Doun in the west is a clarty nest,
And the big stane cities are no for me ;
Sae I'll buckle my pack on my auld bent back
And tak the road for the South Countrie.

Whaur sall I enter the Promised Land,
Ower the Sutra or doun the Lyne,
Up the side o' the water o' Clyde
Or cross the muirs at the heid o' Tyne,
Or staucherin' on by Crawfordjohn
Yont to the glens whaur Tweed rins wee ?—
It's maitter sma' whaur your road may fa'
Gin it land ye safe in the South Countrie.

You are the hills that my hert kens weel,
Hame for the weary, rest for the auld,
Braid and high as the Aprile sky,
Blue on the taps and green i' the fauld :

At ilka turn a bit wanderin' burn,
And a canty biggin' on ilka lea—
There's nocht sae braw in the wide world's schaw
As the heughs and holms o' the South Countrie.

Yon are the lads that my hert loes weel,
Frank and couthy and kind to a',
Wi' the open broo and the mirthfu' mou
And the open door at the e'enin's fa' ;
A trig hamesteid and a lauchin' breed
O' weans that hearten the auld to see—
Sma' or great, can ye find the mate
O' the folk that bide in the South Countrie ?

The lightest fit that traivels the roads
Maun lag and drag as the end grows near ;
Threescore and ten are the years o' men,
And I'm bye the bit by a lang lang year.
Sae I'll seek my rest in the land loe'd best,
And ask nae mair than that God soll gie
To my failin' een for the hinmost scene
The gentle hills o' the South Countrie.

1916

The Shorter Catechism

(With Proofs)

WHEN I was young and herdit sheep,
I read auld tales o' Wallace wight ;
My heid was fou o' sangs and threep
O' folk that feared nae mortal might.
But noo I'm auld and weel I ken
We're made alike o' gowd and mire ;
There's saft bits in the stievest men,
The bairnliest's got a spunk o' fire.
Sae hearken to me, lads,
It's truith that I tell ;—
There's nae man a' courage—
I ken by mysel'.

I've been an elder forty year,
I've tried to keep the narrow way,
I've walked afore the Lord in fear,
I've never missed the kirk a day,
I've read the Bible in and oot,
I ken the feck o't clean by hert ;—
But still and on I sair misdoot
I'm better noo than at the stert.

Sae hearken to me, lads,
It's truith I maintain !—
Man's works are but rags, for
I ken by my ain.

I hae a name for daacent trade ;
I'll wager a' the countryside
Wad swear nae trustier man was made
The ford to soom, the bent to bide.
But when it comes to coupin' horse
I'm juist like a' that e'er were born,
I fling my heels and tak my course—
I'd sell the minister the morn.
Sae hearken to me, lads,
It's truith that I tell :—
There's nae man deid honest—
I ken by mysel'.

1911

THEOCRITUS IN SCOTS

THEOCRITUS IN SCOTS

*The Kirn*¹

(ldyll vii)

'TWAS last back-end that me and Dauvit Sma'
And Robert Todd, the herd at Meldonha',
The hairst weel ower and under rape and thack,
Set oot to keep the kirn at Haystounslack,
Wat Laidlaw's fairm—for Wat's the rale stench breed
The Borders kenned afore the auld lairds dee'd,
And a' the soor-milk Wast ran doun the Tweed.

We werena half the road, nor bye the grain
Whaur auncient Druids left the standin' stane,
When Gidden Scott cam heinchin' ower the muir,
Gidden the wale o' men ; ilk kirn and fair,

¹ The Greek text has not been followed in the songs, as it would be hard to find equivalents for Lycidas and Simichidas in Lowland Scots. Jock's song is a free paraphrase of Victor Hugo's *Guitare*. How close that famous lyric is to the Theocritean manner will be admitted by those who remember Walter Headlam's Greek version of it.

Clippin' and spainin', was a cheerier place
For ae sicht o' his honest bawsened face.
He was a drover, famed frae Clyde to Spey,
The graundest juidge o' beasts—a dealer tae.
His furthy coat o' tup's 'oo spun at hame,
His weel-worn maud that buckled roond his wame,
His snootit kep that hid the broos aneath,
His buits wi' tackets like a harrow's teeth,
His shairny leggin's and his michty staff
Proclaimed him for a drover three mile aff.

" Losh ! lads," he cried, " whaur are ye traivellin' noo,
Trig as the lassies decked for them they loe ?
Is't to a countra splore, or to the toun
Whaur creeshy baillies to their feasts sit doun ?
Or is't some waddin' wi' its pipes and reels
That gars the chuckies loup ahint your heels ? "

" Weel met," says I. " The day our jaunt we mak
To join Wat Laidlaw's kirn at Haystounslack.
Lang is the gait, and, sin' it's pairtly yours,
What say ye to a sang to wile the 'oors ?
In a' the land frae Wigtoun to the Mearns
There's nane that ploos sae straucht the rig o' Burns
As your guid sel' (so rins the countra sough) ;
And I, though frae sic genius far eneuch,
I, tae, hae clinkit rhymes at orra whiles.
We'll niffer sangs to pass the muirland miles."

"Na, Jock," says he, and wagged a sarious pow,
"Sma' share hae I in that divinest lowe.
A roopy craw as weel a pairt might claim
I' the laverock's sang as me in Robin's fame.
But sin' we're a' guid freends, I'll sing a sang
I made last Monday drovin' ower the Whang."¹

Gidden's Song

SIN' Andra took the jee and gaed aff across the sea
I'm as dowff as ony fisher-wife that watches on the sand,
I'm as restless as a staig, me that aince was like a craig,
When I think upon yon far frem't land.

We had often cuisten oot, I mindna what aboot ;
We had feucht a bit and flytit and gien and taen the
blow ;
But oor dander was nae mair than the rouk in simmer air,
For I loe'd him as a lassie loes her joe.

He had sic a couthy way, aye sae canty and sae gay ;
He garred a body's hert loup up and kept the wark
gaun roun' ;
The dreichest saul could see he had sunlicht in his ee,
And there's no his marrow left in the toun.

¹ The Lang Whang is the old Edinburgh-Lanark road.

We were 'greed like twae starks that feed amang the birks,
My every thocht I shared wi' him, his hinmost plack
 was mine ;
We had nocht to hide frae ither, he was mair to me than
 brither ;
But that's a' bye wi't langsyne.

As I gang oot and in, in my heid there rins a tüne,
Some tüne o' Andra's playin' in the happy days that's
 gane.
When I sit at festive scene there's a mist comes ower my
 een
For the kind lad that's left me my lane.

So Gidden spak, and ower the lave o' us cam
A sadness waur than penitential psalm.
The tüne was cried ; nae jovial rantin' stave
Wad set a mood sae pensive and sae grave.
Sae, followin' on, I cleared my hass and sung
A sang I made langsyne when I was young.

Jock's Song

SING, lads, and bend the bicker ; gloamin' draps
 On Wiston side.
A' ye that dwal in sicht o' Tintoock's taps
 Frae Tweed to Clyde

Gae stert your reels and ding the warlock Care
At young bluid's call.

*The wind that blaws frae yont the mountain muir
Will steal my saul.*

Mind ye the lass that iused to bide langsyne
At Coulter-fit ?

(Gae pipe your sprigs, for youth is ill to bin'
And pleesures fit.)

Her mither keep't the inn, and doun the stair
A' day wad bawl.

*The wind that blaws frae yont the mountain muir
Will steal my saul.*

My heid rins round—I think they ca'd her Jean.
She looked sae high,

She walked sae prood, it micht hae been the Queen
As she gaed bye,

Buskit sae trig, and ower her yellow hair
A denty shawl.

*The wind that blaws frae yont the mountain muir
Will steal my saul.*

Ae day the King himsel' was ridin' through
And saw her face.

He telled his son, " For ae kiss o' her mou
I'd change my place . . .

Wi' ony gangrel, roup my royal share,
My kingly hall."

*The wind that blaws frae yont the mountain muir
Will steal my saul.*

I kenna if I loe'd the lassie true,
 But this I ken ;
To get a welcome frae her een o' blue,
 To see again
Her dimpled cheek, ten 'ears o' life I'd spare
 In prison wall.
*The wind that blaws frae yont the mountain muir
 Will steal my saul.*

Ae simmer morn when a' the lift was clear
 And saft winds sighed,
Wi' kilted coats I saw her wanderin' near
 The burnie's tide.
Thinks I, Queen Mary was na half as fair
 In days o' aul'.
*The wind that blaws frae yont the mountain muir
 Will steal my saul.*

Sing, lads, and bend the bicker ; e'enin' fa's—
 My denty doo
Has sell't hersel' for gowd and silken braws
 That weemen loe.
A feckless laird has bocht her beauty rare,
 Her love, her all.
*The wind that blaws frae yont the mountain muir
 Will steal my saul.*

I watched them as their coach gaed ower the pass
Wi' blindit een ;

A shilpit carle aside the brawest lass
That Scotland's seen.

Far, far she's gane, and toom the warld and puir
Whaur I maun dwal.

*The wind that blaws frae yont the mountain muir
Will steal my saul.*

A' day I wander like a restless ghaist
Ower hill and lea ;

The gun hangs in the spence, the rod's unüsed,
The dowg gangs free.

At nicht I dream, and O ! my dreams are sair,
My hert's in thrall.

*The wind that blaws frae yont the mountain muir
Has stown my saul.*

Loud Gidden spak ; " Weel dune !—The convoy's ower.
Here we maun pairt, for I'm for Auchenlour.
Oor forbears, when they set a makars' test
Gied cups and wreaths to him that sang the best.
Nae drink hae I, thae muirland floo'ers are wauf,
Sae tak for awms my trustit hazel staff."

We cried guid-farin' to his massy back,
And turned intil the road for Haystounslack.
Aroond the hills and heughs the gloamin' crap,
And a braw mune cam ridin' ower the slap.

The stirlin's crooded thick as flees in air,
An auld blackcock was flytin' on the muir.
Afore the steadin' cairts were settin' doun
Ilk snoddit lassie in her kirk-gaun gown,
And bauld young lads were swingin' up the braes,
Ilk ane wi' glancin' een and dancin' taes.
The fiddles scrapit and atower the din
The "Floo'ers o' Embro'" soughed oot on the win'.
Furth frae the ben cam sic a noble reek
That hungry folk maun snowk but daurna speak ;—
Haggis and tripe, and puddin's black, and yill,
And guid saut beef and braxy frae the hill,
Crisp aiten farles, bannocks and seein' kail ;
And at the door stood Wat to cry us hail.
His walie nieves upheld a muckle bowl
Whase spicy scent was unction to the saul.
His ladle plowtered in the reamin' brew,
And for us three he filled the rummers fou.
Nae nectar that the auld gods quaffed on hie,
Nae heather wine wanchancy warlocks prie,
Nae Well o' Bethlehem or Siloam's püle,
Was ever half as guid as Wattie's yill.

Heaven send anither 'ear that I gang back
To drink wi' honest folk at Haystounslack !

THEOCRITUS IN SCOTS

The Fishers

(Idyll xxi)

'TIS puirtith sooples heid and hand
And gars inventions fill the land ;
And dreams come fast to folk that lie
Wi' nocht atween them and the sky.

Twae collier lads frae near Lasswade,
Auld skeely fishers, fand their bed
Ae simmer's nicht aside the shaw
Whaur Manor rins by Cademuir Law.
Dry flowe-moss made them pillows fine,
And, for a bield to kep the win',
A muckle craig owerhung the burn,
A' thacked wi' blaeberry and fern.
Aside them lay their rods and reels,
Their flee-books and their auncient creels.
The pooches o' their moleskin breeks
Contained unlawfu' things like cleeks,
For folk that fish to fill their wame
Are no fasteedious at the game.

The twae aye took their jaunts thegither ;
Geordie was ane and Tam the ither.
Their chaumer was the mune-bricht sky,
The siller stream their lullaby.

When knocks in touns were chappin' three,
Tam woke and rubbed a blinkin' ee.
It was the 'oor when troots are boun'
To gulp the May-flee floatin' doun,
Afore the sun is in the glens
And dim are a' the heughs and dens.

TAM

“ Short is the simmer's daurk, they say,
But this ane seemed as lang's the day ;
For siccan dreams as passed my sicht
I never saw in Januar' nicht.
If some auld prophet chiel were here
I wad hae cūrious things to speir.”

GEORDIE

“ It's conscience gars the nightmares rin,
Sae, Tam my lad, what hae ye dune ? ”

TAM

“ Nae ill ; my saul is free frae blame,
Nor hae I wrocht ower hard my wame,
For last I fed, as ye maun awn,
On a sma' troot and pease-meal scone.

But hear my dream, for aiblins you
May find a way to riddle't true. . . .

I thocht that I was castin' steady
At the püle's tail ayont the smiddy,
Wi' finest gut and sma'est flee,
For the air was clear and the water wee ;
When sudden wi' a rowst and swish
I rase a maist enormous fish . . .
I struck and heuked the monster shüre,
Guidsakes ! to see him loup in air !
It was nae saumon, na, nor troot ;
To the last yaird my line gaed oot,
As up the stream the warlock ran
As wild as Job's Leviathan.
I got him stopped below the linn,
Whaur verra near I tumbled in,
Aye prayin' hard my heuk wad haud ;
And syne he turned a doryt jaud,
Sulkin' far doun amang the stanes.
I tapped the butt to stir his banes.
He warsled here and plowtered there,
But still I held him ticht and fair,
The water rinnin' oxter-hie,
The sweat aye drippin' in my ee.
Sae bit by bit I wysed him richt
And broke his stieve and fashious micht,
Till sair fordone he cam to book
And wallopéd in a shallow crook.

I had nae gad, sae doun my wand
I flang and pinned him on the sand.
I claucht him in baith airms and peched
Ashore—he was a michty wecht ;
Nor stopped till I had got him shüre
Amang the threshes on the muir.

Then, Geordie lad, my een I rowed
The beast was made o' solid gowd !—
Sic ferlie as was never kenned,
A' glitterin' gowd frae end to end !
I lauched, I grat, my kep I flang,
I danced a sprig, I sang a sang.
And syne I wished that I micht dee
If wark again was touched by me. . . .

Wi' that I woke ; nae fish was there—
Juist the burnside and empty muir.
Noo tell me honest, Geordie lad,
Think ye yon daftlike aith will haud ? ”

GEORDIE

“ Tuts, Tam ye fule, the aith ye sware
Was like your fish, nae less, nae mair.
For dreams are nocht but simmer rouk,
And him that trusts them hunts the gowk. . . .
It’s time we catched some fish o’ flesh
Or we will baith gang brekfastless.”

INTER ARMA

INTER ARMA

Sweet Argos

An Epistle from Jock in billets to Sandy in the trenches.

WHEN the Almighty took His hand
Frae shapin' skies and seas and land,
Some orra bits left ower He fand,
Riddled them roun'—
A clart o' stane and wud and sand—
And made this toun.

A glaury loan, a tumblin' kirk,
Twae glandered mears, a dwaibly stirk,
Hens, ae auld wife, a wauflike birk—
That's whaur I dwal,
While you are fechtin' like a Turk
Ayont Thiepval.

The weet drips through the bauks abune,
Ootbye the cundies roar and rin,
There's comfort naether oot nor in,
The wind gangs blather;—
We maun be michty sunk in sin
To earn sic wather.

But, Sandy lad, for you it's waur,
You on that muckle Zollern scaur,
Your lintwhite locks a' fyled wi' glaur,
And hungry—my word !
While Gairmans dae the best they daur
To send ye skyward. . . .

• • • • •

'Twas late yestreen that we cam doun
The road that leads frae Morval toun ;
We cam like mice, nae sang nor soun',
Nae daff nor jest ;
Like ghaists that trail the midnicht roun'
We crap to rest.

For sax weeks hunkerin' in a hole
We'd kenned the warst a man can thole—
Nae skirlin' dash frae goal to goal
Yellin' like wud,
But the lang stell that wechts the soul
And tooms the bluid.

Weel, yestreen we limped alang,
Me and auld Dave frae Cambuslang,
And Andra, him that had the gang
In Tamson's mills,
And Linton Bob that wrocht amang
The Pentland Hills.

And as we socht oor shauchlin' way
Atween the runts o' Bernafay,
The mune ayont the darkenin' brae
Lichted a gap.
Bob peched. " Ma God," I heard him say,
" The Cauldstaneslap ! "

Syne we won ower the hinmost rig
Amang the dumps, whaur warm and trig
The braziers lowe and wee trucks jig
Frae bing to ree.
Dave gripped my airm. " It's fair Coatbrig ! "
He stepped oot free. . . .

• • • • •

This morn I'm sittin' on a box,
Reddin' an unco pair o' socks,
Watchin' the yaird whaur muckle docks
And nettles blaw,
And turks' caps, marygolds and phlox
Stand in a raw.

The berry busses hing wi' weet,
The smiddy clang comes doun the street,
A coo is routin', bairnies greet,
A young cock craws.—
I shut my een ; my traivelled feet
Were back i' the Shaws.

Back twenty year. A tautit wean,
I heard my granny's voice complain
O' bursted buits : I saw the rain
 Rin aff the byre ;
The burn wi' foamin' yellow mane
 Roared doun the swire.

A can o' worms ae pooch concealed,
The tither scones weel brooned and jeeled ;
Let eld sit cowerin' in the bield.
 Youth maun be oot ;
The rain may pour, he's for the field
 To catch a troot. . . .

• • • • •
And, Sandy lad, a stound o' joy
Gaed through my breist. A halfin's ploy,
An auld wife's tale, a bairnie's toy,
 A lassie's favour,
Are things nae war can clean destroy
 Nor kill the savour.

It's in sma' things that greatness lies,
The simple aye confoonds the wise,
The towers that ettle at the skies
 Crack, coup and tummle,
The blather, swalled to unco size,
 Bursts wi' a rumble. . . .

Straucht to the Deil oor hainin's fly ;
A spate can droon the best o' kye :
The day oor heids we cairry high
 And wanton rarely :—
The morn in some black sheugh dounbye
 We floonder sairly.

The breist o' man is fortune-pruif,
He heeds nor jade nor deil nor cuif,
If twae-three things the Guid Folk give
 His lot to cheer,
The sma' things that oor mortal luve
 Maun aye haud dear.

What gars us fecht ? It's no the law,
Nor poaliticians in a raw,
Nor hate o' folk we never saw ;—
 Oot in yon hell
I've killed a wheen—the job wad staw
 Auld Hornie's sel'.

It's luve, my man, nae less, nae mair,—
Luve o' auld freends at kirk and fair,
Auld-farrant sangs that memories bear
 O' but and ben,
Some wee cot-hoose far up the muir
 Or doun the glen.

And Gairmans are nae doot the same:
The lad ye've stickin' in the wame
Fechts no for deevilment or fame,
 But juist for pride
In his bit dacent canty hame
 By some burnside.

It's queer that the Almichty's plan
Sud set oot man to fecht wi' man
For the same luve—their native lan',
 And wife and weans.
It's queer, but threep the best ye can,
 The truith remains.

The warld's a fecht. Frae star to stane
The hale Creation strives in pain.
Paiks maun be tholed by ilk alone,
 The cup be drainit,
If man's to get the bunemost gain
 That God's ordainit.

But luve's the fire that keeps him gaun,
Ilk puir forjaskit weariet man.
Hate sparks like pouther in the pan,
 And pride will flicker,
But luve will burn till skies are faun,
 Mair clear and siccar.

And a' we socht o' honest worth
We'll find again in nobler birth,
For Heaven itsel' begins on earth,
 And caps the riggin'
O' what in pain and toil and dearth
 We've aye been biggin'.

Nae walth o' gowden streets for me ;
I ask but that my een sud see
The auld green hopes, the broomy lea.
 The clear burn's püles,
And wander whaur the wind blaws free
 Frae heather hills.

• • • •

Sae, Sandy, if it's written true
That you and me sud warstle through,
Wi' whatna joy we'll haud the ploo
 And delve the yaird !
Ten thoosandfauld the mair we'll loe
 Oor Border swaird !

But if like ither dacent men
We've looked oor last on Etterick glen
And some day suné will see the en'
 That brings nae shame,
We'll face't,—for in that 'oor we'll ken
 We're hame, we're hame.

On Leave

I HAD auchteen months o' the war,
Steel and pouther and reek,
Fitsore, weary and wauf,—
Syne I got hame for a week.

Daft-like I entered the toun,
I scarcely kenned for my ain.
I sleepit twae days in my bed,
The third I buried my wean.

The wife sat greetin' at hame,
While I wandered oot to the hill,
My hert as cauld as a stane,
But my heid gaun roond like a mill.

I wasna the man I had been,—
Juist a gangrel dozin' in fits ;—
The pin had faun oot o' the warld,
And I doddered amang the bits.

I clamb to the Lammerlaw
And sat me doun on the cairn ;—
The best o' my freends were deid,
And noo I had buried my bairn ;—

The stink o' the gas in my nose,
The colour o' bluid in my ee,
And the biddin' o' Hell in my lug
To curse my Maker and dee.

But up in that gloamin' hour,
On the heather and thymy sod,
Wi' the sun gaun doun in the Wast
I made my peace wi' God. . . .

I saw a thoosand hills,
Green and gowd i' the licht,
Roond and backit like sheep,
Huddle into the nicht.

But I kenned they werena hills,
But the same as the mounds ye see
Doun by the back o' the line
Whaur they bury oor lads that dee.

They were juist the same as at Loos
Whaur we happit Andra and Dave.—
There was naething in life but death,
And a' the warld was a grave.

A' the hills were graves,
The graves o' the deid langsyne,
And somewhere oot in the Wast
Was the grummlin' battle-line.

But up frae the howe o' the glen
Came the waft o' the simmer een.
The stink gaed oot o' my nose,
And I sniffed it, caller and clean.

The smell o' the simmer hills,
Thyme and hinny and heather,
Jeniper, birk and fern,
Rose in the lown June weather.

It minded me o' auld days,
When I wandered barefit there,
Guddlin' troot in the burns,
Howkin' the tod frae his lair.

If a' the hills were graves
There was peace for the folk aneath
And peace for the folk abune,
And life in the hert o' death. . . .

Up frae the howe o' the glen
Cam the murmur o' wells that creep
To swell the heids o' the burns,
And the kindly voices o' sheep.

And the cry o' a whaup on the wing,
And a plover seekin' its bield.—
And oot o' my crazy lugs
Went the din o' the battlefield.

I flang me doun on my knees
And I prayed as my hert wad break,
And I got my answer sune,
For oot o' the nicht God spake.

As a man that wauks frae a stound
And kens but a single thocht,
Oot o' the wind and the nicht
I got the peace that I socht.

Loos and the Lammerlaw,
The battle was feucht in baith,
Death was roond and abune,
But life in the hert o' death.

A' the warld was a grave,
But the grass on the graves was green,
And the stanes were bields for hames,
And the laddies played atween.

Kneelin' aside the cairn
On the heather and thymy sod,
The place I had kenned as a bairn,
I made my peace wi' God.

The Kirk Bell

WHEN oor lads gaed ower the tap
It was nine o' a Sabbath morn.

I felt as my hert wad stап,

And I wished I had ne'er been born ;

I wished I had ne'er been born

For I feared baith the foe and mysel',

Till there fell on my ear forlorn

The jow o' an auld kirk bell.

For a moment the guns were deid,

Sae I heard it faint and far ;

And that bell was ringin' inside my heid

As I stauchered into the war.

I heard nae ither soun',

Though the air was a wild stramash,
And oor barrage beat the grun'

Like the crack o' a cairter's lash,

Like the sting o' a lang whup lash ;

And ilk breath war a prayer or an aith,

And whistle and drone and crash

Made the pitiless sang o' death.

But in a' that deavin' din
Like the cry o' the lost in Hell,
I was hearkenin' to a peacefu' tüne
In the jow o' a far-off bell.

I had on my Sabbath claes,
And was steppin' doucely the gait
To the kirk on the broomy braes ;
I was standin' aside the yett,
Crackin' aside the yett ;
And syne I was singin' loud
'Mang the lasses snod and blate
Wi' their roses and southernwood.
I hae nae mind o' the tex'
For the psalm was the thing for me,
And I gied a gey wheen Huns their paiks
To the tüne o' auld "Dundee."

They tell me I feucht like wud,
And I've got a medal to shaw,
But in a' that habble o' smoke and bluid
My mind was far awa' ;
My mind was far awa'
In the peace o' a simmer glen,
Daunderin' hame ower the heathery law,
Wi' twae-three ither men. . . .
But sudden the lift grew red
Ere we wan to the pairtin' place ;
And the next I kenned I was lyin' in bed
And a Sister washin' my face.

My faither was stench U.P. ;
Nae guid in Rome could he fin' ;
But, this war weel ower, I'm gaun back to see
That kirk ahint the line—
That kirk ahint oor line,
And siller the priest I'll gie
To pray for the sauls o' the deid langsyne
Whae bigged the steeple for me.
It's no that I'm chief wi' the Pape,
But I owe the warl'd to yon bell ;
And the beadle that swung the rape
Will get half a croon for himsel'.

1917

Home Thoughts from Abroad

AFTER the war, says the papers, they'll no be content
at hame,
*The lads that hae feucht wi' death twae 'ear i' the mud and
the rain and the snaw ;*
For aifter a sodger's life the shop will be unco tame ;
*They'll etile at fortune and freedom in the new lands far
awa'.*

No me !
By God ! No me !
Aince we hae lickit oor faes
And aince I get oot o' this hell,
For the rest o' my leevin' days
I'll mak a pet o' mysel'.
I'll haste me back wi' an eident fit
And settle again in the same auld bit.
And oh ! the comfort to snowk again
The reek o' my mither's but-and-ben,
The wee box-bed and the ingle neuk
And the kail-pat hung frae the chimley-heuk !

I'll gang back to the shop like a laddie to play,
Tak doun the shutters at skreigh o' day,
And weigh oot floor wi' a carefu' pride,
And hear the clash o' the countraside.
I'll wear for ordinar' a roond hard hat,
A collar and dicky and black cravat.
If the weather's wat I'll no stir ootbye
Wi'oot an umbrella to keep me dry.
I think I'd better no tak a wife—
I've had a' the adventure I want in life.—
But at nicht, when the doors are steeked, I'll sit,
While the bleeze loups high frae the aiken ruit,
And smoke my pipe aside the crook.
And read in some douce auld-farrant book ;
Or crack wi' Davie and mix a rummer,
While the auld wife's pow nid-nods in slum'er ;
And hark to the winds gaun tearin' bye
And thank the Lord I'm sae warm and dry.

When simmer brings the lang bricht e'en,
I'll daunder doun to the bowling-green,
Or delve my yaird and my roses tend
For the big floo'er-show in the next back-end.
Whiles, when the sun blinks aifter rain,
I'll tak my rod and gang up the glen ;
Me and Davie, we ken the püles
Whaur the troot grow great in the howes o' the hills ;
And, wanderin' back when the gloamin' fa's
And the midges dance in the hazel shaws,

We'll stop at the yett ayont the hicht
And drink great wauchts o' the scented nicht,
While the hoose lamps kin'le raw by raw
And a yellow star hings ower the Law.
Davie will lauch like a wean at a fair
And nip my airm to mak certain shüre
That we're back frae yon place o' dule and dreid,
To oor ain kind warld—

But Davie's deid!

Nae mair gude nor ill can betide him.
We happit him doun by Beaumont toun,
And the half o' my herl's in the mools aside him.

1917

*Fragment of an Ode in Praise of the
Royal Scots Fusiliers*

YELL a' hae heard tell o' the Fusilier Jocks,
The famous auld Fusilier Jocks !
They're as stieve as a stane,
And as teuch as a bane,
And as gleg as a pack o' muircocks.
They're maistly as braid as they're lang,
And the Gairman's a pump off the fang
When he faces the fire in their ee.
They're no verra bonny,
I question if ony
Mair terrible sicht ye could see
Than a chairge o' the Fusilier Jocks.
It gars Hindenburg swear
“ *Gott in Himmel*, nae mair
O' thae sudden and scan'alous shocks ! ”
And the cannon o' Krupp
Ane and a' they shut up
Like a pentit bit jaick-in-the-box,
At the rush o' the Fusilier Jocks.

• • • • • •

The Kaiser he says to his son
(The auld ane that looks like a fox)—
“ I went ower far
When I stertit this war,
Forgettin’ the Fusilier Jocks.
I could manage the French and Italians and Poles,
The Russians and Tartars and yellow Mongols,
The Serbs and the Belgians, the English and Greeks,
And even the lads that gang wantin’ the breeks ;
But what o’ thae Fusilier Jocks,
That stopna for duntin’ and knocks ?
They’d rin wi’ a yell
Ower the plainstanes o’ Hell ;
They’re no men ava—they are rocks !
They’d gang barefit
Through the Bottomless Pit,
And they’ll tak Berlin in their socks,—
Will thae terrible Fusilier Jocks !
Thae terrible Fusilier Jocks ! . . .”

1917

The Great Ones

A E morn aside the road frae Bray
I wrocht my squad to mend the track ;
A feck o' sodgers passed that way
And garred me often straucht my back.

By cam a General on a horse,
A jinglin' lad on either side.
I gie'd my best salute of course,
Weel pleased to see sic honest pride.

And syne twae Frenchmen in a cawr—
Yon are the lads to speel the braes ;
They covered me inch-deep wi' glaur
And verra near ran ower my taes.

And last the pipes, and at their tail
Oor gaucy lads in martial line.
I stopped my wark and cried them hail,
And wished them weel for auld lang syne.

• • • • •

An auld chap plooin' on the muir
Ne'er jee'd his heid nor held his han',
But drave his furrow straucht and fair,—
Thinks I, " But ye're the biggest man."

1916

Fisher Jamie

PUIR Jamie's killed. A better lad
 Ye wadna find to busk a flee
Or burn a püle or wield a gad
 Frae Berwick to the Clints o' Dee.

And noo he's in a happier land.—
 It's Gospel truth and Gospel law
That Heaven's yett maun open stand
 To folk that for their country fa'.

But Jamie will be ill to mate ;
 He lo'ed nae müsic, kenned nae tünes
Except the sang o' Tweed in spate,
 Or Talla loupin' ower its linns.

I sair misdoot that Jamie's heid
 A croun o' gowd will never please ;
He liked a kep o' dacent tweed
 Whaur he could stick his casts o' flees.

If Heaven is a' that man can dream
And a' that honest herts can wish,
It maun provide some muirland stream,
For Jamie dreamed o' nocht but fish.

And weel I wot he'll up and speir
In his bit blate and canty way,
Wi' kind Apostles standin' near
Whae in their time were fishers tae.

He'll offer back his gowden croun
And in its place a rod he'll seek,
And bashfu'-like his herp lay doun
And speir a leister and a cleek.

For Jims had aye a poachin' whim ;
He'll sune grow tired, wi' lawfu' flee
Made frae the wings o' cherubim,
O' castin' ower the Crystal Sea. . . .

I picter him at gloamin' tide
Steekin' the backdoor o' his hame
And hastin' to the waterside
To play again the auld auld game ;

And syne wi' saumon on his back,
Catch't clean against the Heavenly law,
And Heavenly byliffs on his track,
Gaun linkin' doun some Heavenly shaw.

BOOK II
ENGLISH

*Fratri Dilectissimo*¹

W. H. B.

WHEN we were little wandering boys,
And every hill was blue and high,
On ballad ways and martial joys
We fed our fancies, you and I.
With Bruce we crouched in bracken shade,
With Douglas charged the Paynim foes ;
And oft in moorland noons I played
Colkitto to your grave Montrose.

The obliterating seasons flow—
They cannot kill our boyish game.
Though creeds may change and kings may go,
Yet burns undimmed the ancient flame.
While young men in their pride make haste
The wrong to right, the bond to free,
And plant a garden in the waste,
Still rides our Scottish chivalry.

¹ From *Montrose*.

Another end had held your dream—
To die fulfilled of hope and might,
To pass in one swift rapturous gleam
From mortal to immortal light—
But through long hours of labouring breath
You watched the world grow small and far,
And met the constant eyes of Death,
And haply knew how kind they are.

One boon the Fates relenting gave—
Not where the scented hill-wind blows
From cedar thickets lies your grave,
Nor 'mid the steep Himálayan snows.
Night calls the stragglers to the nest,
And at long last 'tis home indeed
For your far-wandering feet to rest
Forever by the crooks of Tweed.

In perfect honour, perfect truth,
And gentleness to all mankind,
You trod the golden paths of youth,
Then left the world and youth behind.
Ah no ! 'Tis we who fade and fail—
And you from Time's slow torments free
Shall pass from strength to strength and scale
The steeps of immortality.

Dear heart, in that serener air,
If blessed souls may backward gaze,
Some slender nook of memory spare
For our old happy moorland days.
I sit alone, and musing fills
My breast with pain that shall not die,
Till once again o'er greener hills
We ride together, you and I.

1912

To Lionel Phillips¹

TIME, they say, must the best of us capture,
 And travel and battle and gems and gold
No more can kindle the ancient rapture,
 For even the youngest of hearts grows old.
But in you, I think, the boy is not over ;
 So take this medley of ways and wars
As the gift of a friend and a fellow-lover
 Of the fairest country under the stars.

1909

¹ From *Prester John*.

•

To my Father

Quis . . . significant se patriam inquirere.

HE was the Interpreter to mistrustful souls ;
The wearied feet he led into the cool,
Calm plain called Ease ; he gave the faint to drink ;
Dull hearts he brought to the House Beautiful ;
The timorous knew his heartening on the brink
Where the Dark River rolls ;
He drew men from the town of Vanity,
Past Demas' mine and Castle Doubting's towers,
To the green hills where the wise Shepherds be,
And Zion's songs are crooned among the flowers.

1912

A. E. B.

Arras. Easter Monday, 1917

"I am come from him whom thou hast loved and followed ; and my message is to tell thee that he expects thee at his table to sup with him in his kingdom the next day after Easter."

The Pilgrim's Progress.

I

A MILE or two from Arras town
The yellow moorland stretches far,
And from its crest the roads go down
Like arrows to the front of war.

All day the laden convoys pass,
The sunburnt troops are swinging by,
And far above the trampled grass
The droning planes climb up the sky.

In April when I passed that way
An April joy was in the breeze ;
The hollows of the woods were gay
With slender-stalked anemones.

The horn of Spring was faintly blown,
Bidding a ransomed world awake,
Nor could the throbbing batteries drown
The nesting linnets in the brake.

And as I stood beside the grave,
Where 'mid your kindly Scots you lie,
I could not think that one so brave,
So glad of heart, so kind of eye,

Had found the deep and dreamless rest,
Which men may crave who bear the scars
Of weary decades on their breast
And yearn for slumber after wars.

You scarce had shed your boyhood's years,
In every vein the blood ran young,
Your soul uncramped by ageing fears,
Your tales untold, your songs unsung.

As if my sorrow to beguile,
I heard the ballad's bold refrain :
I'le lay me downe and bleed a-while,
And then I'le rise and fight again.

II

Long, long ago, when all the lands
Were deep in peace as summer sea,
God chose His squires, and trained their hands
For these stern lists of liberty.

You made no careful plans for life,
Happy with dreams and books and friends,
Incurious of our worldly strife,
As dedicate to nobler ends ;

Like some young knight, who kept his sword
 Virgin from common broils that he
Might flesh it on the Paynim horde
 When Richard stormed through Galilee.

I mind how on the hills of home
 You ever lagged and strayed aside,
A brooding boy whose thoughts would roam
 O'er gallant fates that might betide.

But not the wildest dream of youth,
 Born of the sunset and the Spring,
Could match the splendour of the truth
 That waited on your journeying.

The ancient city deep in night,
 The wind among its crumbling spires ;
The assembly in the chill twilight
 Murky with ghosts of wayward fires ;

The last brave words ; the outward march ;
 The punctual shells, whose ceaseless beat
Made the dark sky an echoing arch
 Pounded without by demon feet ;

While with the morn wild April blew
 Her snows across the tortured mead,
The springtide gales that once you knew
 In glens beside the founts of Tweed ;

And then the appointed hour ; the dread
Gun-flare that turned the sleet to flame,
When, the long vigil o'er, you led
Your men to purge the world of shame.

I know that in your soul was then
No fear to irk or hate to mar,
But a strong peace and joy as when
The Sons of God go forth to war.

You did not fall till you had won
The utmost trench, and knew the pride
Of a high duty nobly done
And a great longing satisfied.

You left the line with jest and smile
And heart that would not bow to pain.
I'le lay me downe and bleed a-while,
And then I'le rise and fight again.

III

We cannot grieve that youth so strong
Should miss the encroaching frosts of age,
The sordid fears, the unnerving throng
Of cares that are man's heritage.

A boy in years, you travelled far
And found perfection in short space ;
By the stern sacrament of war
You grew in gifts and powers and grace,

Until, with soul attuned and tried,
 You reached full manhood, staunch and free,
And bore a spirit o'er the tide
 Most ripe for immortality.

We cannot tell what grave pure light
 Illumes for you our earthly show,
What heavenly love and infinite
 Wisdom is yours ; but this we know—

That just beyond our senses' veil
 You dwell unseen in youth and joy,
Joy which no languid years can pale,
 Youth which is younger than the boy.

Your kindly voice enheartens still,
 Your happy laughter is not dead,
And when we roam our Border hill
 You walk beside with lighter tread.

All day where lies your valiant dust
 The troops go by to hold the line ;—
They never steel for ward or thrust
 But you are with them, brother mine.

Still, still you list the ancient tunes,
 The comrade fire is with you yet ;
Still, still you lead your worn platoons
 Beyond the farthest parapet.

And when to chaos and black night
At last the broken eagles flee,
Your heart will know the stern delight
Of his who succours liberty.

I stood beside your new-made grave
And as I mused my sorrow fled,
Save for those mortal thoughts that crave
For sight of those whom men call dead.

I knew you moved in ampler powers,
A warrior in a purer strife,
Walking that world that shall be ours
When death has called us dead to life.

The rough white cross above your breast,
The earth ungraced by flower or stone
Are bivouac marks of those that rest
One instant ere they hasten on.

More fit such grave than funeral pile,
Than requiem dirge the ballad strain :
I'le lay me downe and bleed a-while,
And then I'le rise and fight again.

1917

•

*To Major-General
The Hon. Sir Reginald Talbot, K.C.B.¹*

I TELL of old Virginian ways ;
And who more fit my tale to scan
Than you, who knew in far-off days
The eager horse of Sheridan ;
Who saw the sullen meads of fate,
The tattered scrub, the blood-drenched sod,
Where Lee, the greatest of the great,
Bent to the storm of God ?

I tell lost tales of savage wars ;
And you have known the desert sands,
The camp beneath the silver stars,
The rush at dawn of Arab bands,
The fruitless toil, the hopeless dream,
The fainting feet, the faltering breath,
While Gordon by the ancient stream
Waited at ease on death.

¹ From *Salute to Adventurers*.

And now, aloof from camp and field,
 You spend your sunny autumn hours
Where the green folds of Chiltern shield
 The nooks of Thames amid the flowers :—
You who have borne that name of pride,
 In honour clean from fear or stain,
Which Talbot won by Henry's side
 In vanquished Aquitaine.

1914

To Ferris Greenslet

THE trout that haunts the Beaverkill
Will flick the same sarcastic tail,
When wrongly struck, as him my skill
Would wile in vain from Tweed or Kale.

The same old tremor of the Spring
Assails the heart of you and me,
Nor does the reel less blithely ring
By Willowemoc than by Dee.

As bright the Amonoosuc streams
Flit through their silent, scented woods
As those which haunt my waking dreams
In Hebridean solitudes.

Your land, old friend, is one with mine,
Whate'er may hap from time or tide,
While with St. Izaak the Divine
We worship at the waterside.

1929

•

*From the Pentlands, Looking
North and South*

A ROUND my feet the clouds are drawn
In the cold mystery of the dawn ;
No breezes cheer, no guests intrude
My mossy, mist-clad solitude ;
When sudden down the steeps of sky
Flames a long, lightening wind. On high
The steel-blue arch shines clear, and far,
In the low lands where cattle are,
Towns smoke. And swift, a haze, a gleam,—
The Firth lies like a frozen stream,
Reddening with morn. Tall spires of ships,
Like thorns about the harbour's lips,
Now shake faint canvas, now, asleep,
Their salt, uneasy slumbers keep ;
While golden-grey o'er kirk and wall
Day wakes in the ancient capital.

Before me lie the lists of strife,
The caravanserai of life,

Whence from the gates the merchants go
On the world's highways ; to and fro
Sail laden ships ; and in the street
The lone foot-traveller shakes his feet,
And in some corner by the fire
Tells the old tale of heart's desire.
Thither from alien seas and skies
Comes the far-quested merchandise :—
Wrought silks of Broussa, Mocha's ware
Brown-tinted, fragrant, and the rare
Thin perfumes that the rose's breath
Has sought, immortal in her death :
Gold, gems, and spice, and haply still
The red rough largess of the hill
Which takes the sun and bears the vines
Among the haunted Apennines.
And he who treads the cobbled street
To-day in the cold North may meet,
Come month, come year, the dusky East,
And share the Caliph's secret feast ;
Or in the toil of wind and sun
Bear pilgrim-staff, forlorn, fordone,
Till o'er the steppe, athwart the sand,
Gleam the far gates of Samarkand.
The ringing quay, the weathered face,
Fair skies, dusk hands, the ocean race,
The palm-girt isle, the frosty shore,
Gales and hot suns the wide world o'er,
Grey North, red South, and burnished West,
The goals of the old tireless quest,

Leap in the smoke, immortal, free,
Where shines yon morning fringe of sea.

I turn ;—how still the moorlands lie,
Sleep-locked beneath the awakening sky !
The film of morn is silver-grey
On the young heather, and away,
Dim, distant, set in ribs of hill,
Green glens are shining, stream and mill
Clachan and kirk and garden-ground,
All silent in the hush profound
Which haunts alone the hills' recess,
The antique home of quietness.
Nor to the folk can piper play
The tune of “ Hills and Far Away,”
For they are with them. Morn can fire
No peaks of weary heart's desire,
Nor the red sunset flame behind
Some ancient ridge of longing mind.
For Arcady is here, around,
In lilt of stream, in the clear sound
Of lark and moorbird, in the bold
Gay glamour of the evening gold.
And so the wheel of seasons moves
To kirk and market, to mild loves
And modest hates, and still the sight
Of brown kind faces, and when night
Draws dark around with age and fear
Theirs is the simple hope to cheer.—
A land of peace where lost romance

And ghostly shine of helm and lance
Still dwell by castled scarp and lea
And the lost homes of chivalry,
And the good fairy folk, my dear,
Who speak for cunning souls to hear,
In crook of glen and bower of hill
Sing of the Happy Ages still.

O Thou to whom man's heart is known,
Grant me my morning orison.
Grant me the rover's path—to see
The dawn arise, the daylight flee,
In the far wastes of sand and sun !
Grant me with venturous heart to run
On the old highway, where in pain
And ecstasy man strives amain,
Outstrips his fellows, or, too weak,
Finds the great rest that wanderers seek !
Grant me the joy of wind and brine,
The zest of food, the taste of wine,
The fighter's strength, the echoing strife,
The high tumultuous lists of life—
May I ne'er lag, nor hapless fall,
Nor weary at the battle-call ! . . .
But when the even brings surcease,
Grant me the happy moorland peace ;
That in my heart's depth ever lie
That ancient land of heath and sky,
Where the old rhymes and stories fall
In kindly, soothing pastoral.

There in the hills sweet silence lies,
And Death himself wears friendly guise;
There be my lot, my twilight stage,
Dear city of my pilgrimage.

1898

The Strong Man Armed

“ **G**IFT me guerdon and grant me grace,”
Said the Lord of the North.

“ Nothing I ask thee of gear or place
Ere I get me forth.

Gift one guerdon to mine and me
For the shade and the sheen.”

• • • • •
“ Ask and it shall be given unto thee,”
Said Mary the Queen.

“ May I never falter the wide world through,
But stand in the gate :
May my sword bite sharp and my steel ring true
At the ford and the strait :
Bide not on bed nor dally with song
When the strife goeth keen :
This be my boon from the Gods of the Strong ! ”

• • • • •
“ Be it so,” said the Queen.

“ May I stand in the mist and the clear and the chill,
In the cycle of wars,
In the brown of the moss and the grey of the hill
With my eyes to the stars !
Gift this guerdon and grant this grace
That I bid good e'en,
The sword in the hand and the foot to the race,
The wind in my teeth and the rain in my face ! ”

“ Be it so,” said the Queen.

1895

The Soldier of Fortune

I HAVE seen thy face in the foray, I have heard thy voice in the fray,
When the stars shrunk in the silence, and the wild midnights blew.
Men have worn their steel blades, seeking by night and day ;
Selling their souls for the vain dreams—I have followed the true.
Frosts have dulled the scabbard, suns have furrowed the thong,
And the great winds of the north-east have steeled the vagrant eye.
So through the world I wander, haggard and fierce and strong,
Seeking the goal I see not, toiling I tell not why.

I have loved all good things, song and woman and wine,
The hearth's red glow in the even, the gladsome face of a friend,
The suns and snows of the hill land, the sting of the winter's brine,

Dawn and noon and the twilight, day and the daylight's
end.

I have ridden the old path, ridden it fierce and strong,
By camp and city and moorland and the grey face of the
sea.

Wrath abides on my forehead but at my heart a song,
The ancient wayfaring ballad, the royal chant of the
free.

For ever in cloud or in maytide Thy voice has been in
my ear,

In the quivering mists of battle Thy face has shone like
a star.

Never the steel ranks broke when the Lord sent forth His
fear

But Thy hand has held my bridle and girt my soul for
war.

I am broken and houseless, lost my clan and my name ;
A stranger treads on my homelands, no heart remem-
bereth me.—

But be Thou my portion, Lady of dew and flame !
Little I ask of the red gold, having the winds and thee.

1899

The Singer

COLD blows the drift on the hill,
Sere is the heather,
High goes the wind and shrill,
Mirk is the weather.
Stout be the front I show,
Come what the gods send !
Plaided and girt I go
Forth to the world's end.

My brain is the stithy of years,
My heart the red gold
Which the gods with sharp anguish and tears
Have wrought from of old.
In the shining first dawn o' the world,
I was old as the sky—
The morning dew on the field
Is no younger than I.

I am the magician of life,
The hero of runes ;
The sorrows of eld and old strife
Ring clear in my tunes.

The sea lends her minstrel voice,
The storm-cloud its grey ;
And ladies have wept at my notes
Fair ladies and gay.

My home is the rim of the mist,
The ring of the spray.
The hart has his corrie, the hawk has her nest,
But I—the Lost Way.
Come dawning or noontide, come winter or spring,
Come leisure, come war,
I tarry not, I, but my burden I sing
Beyond and afar.

I sing of lost hopes and old kings
And the maids of the past ;
Ye shiver adread at my strings
But ye heed them at last.
I sing of cold death and the grave—
Fools tremble afraid :
I sing of hot life, and the brave
Go forth undismayed.

I sleep by the well-head of joy
And the fountain of pain.
Man lives, loves, and fights, and then is not—
I only remain.

Ye mock me and hold me to scorn—
I seek not your grace ;
Ye gird me with terror—forlorn,
I laugh in your face

1898

*Atta's Song*¹

I WILL sing of thee,
Great Sea-Mother,
Whose white arms gather
Thy sons in the ending :
And draw them homeward
From far sad marches—
Wild lands in the sunset,
Bitter shores of the morning—
Soothe them and guide them
By shining pathways
Homeward to thee.

All day I have striven in dark glens
With parched throat and dim eyes,
Where the red crags choke the stream
And dank thickets hide the spear.
I have spilled the blood of my foes,
But their wolves have torn my flanks.
I am faint, O Mother,
Faint and aweary.

¹ From *The Moon Endureth*—the song of a Lemnian who died at Thermopylae.

I have longed for thy cool winds
And thy kind grey eyes
And thy lover's arms.

At the even I came
To a land of terrors,
Of hot swamps where the feet mired
And streams that flowered red with blood.
There I strove with thousands,
Wild-eyed and lost,
As a lion among serpents.
—But sudden before me
I saw the flash
Of the sweet wide waters
That wash my homeland
And mirror the stars of home.
Then sang I for joy,
For I knew the Preserver,
Thee, the Uniter,
The great Sea-Mother.
Soon will the light come,
And the salt winds and the tides
Will bear me home.

Far in the sunrise,
Nestled in thy bosom,
Lies my own green isle.
Thither wilt thou bear me
To where, above the sea-cliffs,

Stretch mild meadows, flower-decked, thyme-scented,
Crisp with sea breezes.
There my flocks feed
On sunny uplands,
Looking over the waters
To where the mount Saos
Raises pure snows to God.

Hermes, guide of souls,
I made thee a shrine in my orchard,
And round thy olive-wood limbs
The maidens twined Spring blossoms—
Violet and helichryse
And the pale wind flowers.
Keep thou watch for me,
For I am coming.
Tell to my lady
And to all my kinsfolk
That I who have gone from them
Tarry not long, but come swift o'er the sea-path,
My feet light with joy,
My eyes bright with longing.
For little it matters
Where a man may fall,
If he fall by the sea-shore ;
The kind waters await him,
The white arms are around him,
And the wise Mother of Men
Will carry him home.

I who sing
Wait joyfully on the morning.
Ten thousand beset me
And their spears ache for my heart.
They will crush me and grind me to mire,
So that none will know the man that once was me.
But at the first light I shall be gone,
Singing, flitting o'er the grey waters,
Outward, homeward,
To thee, the Preserver,
Thee, the Uniter,
Mother the Sea.

1910

Processional¹

IN the ancient orderly places, with a blank and orderly mind,

We sit in our green walled gardens and our corn and oil increase;

Sunset nor dawn can wake us, for the face of the heavens is kind;

We light our taper at even and call our comfort peace.

Peaceful our clear horizon ; calm as our sheltered days

Are the lilded meadows we dwell in, the decent highways we tread.

Duly we make our offerings, but we know not the God we praise,

For He is the God of the living, and we, His children, are dead.

I will arise and get me beyond this country of dreams,
Where all is ancient and ordered and hoar with the frost of years,

To the land where loftier mountains cradle their wilder streams,

And the fruitful earth is blessed with more bountiful smiles and tears :—

¹ From *A Lodge in the Wilderness*.

There in the home of the lightnings, where the fear of the
Lord is set free,
Where the thunderous midnights fade to the turquoise
magic of morn,
The days of man are a vapour, blown from a shoreless sea,
A little cloud before sunrise, a cry in the void forlorn.

I am weary of men and cities and the service of little things,
Where the flame-like glories of life are shrunk to a
candle's ray.

Smite me, my God, with Thy presence, blind my eyes
with Thy wings,
In the heart of Thy virgin earth show me Thy secret
way!

1906

Pierce the Piper's Song¹

“WORM at my heart and fever in my head—
There is no peace for any but the dead.
Only the dead are beautiful and free.
Mortis cupiditas captavit me.”

1929

Sabine's Song

SUMMER has come with love to town;
Throstle in bush and lark on down
Merrily tell their tale-o.
Folks that pine now drink sunshine
More strong than winter's ale-o.
Sweet mistress, why so pale-o?
I hie to thee, as river to sea,
When the deer draw to the dale-o.

¹ From *The Blanket of the Dark*.

•

Midwinter's Song¹

DIANA and her darling crew
Will pluck your fingers fine,
And lead you forth right pleasantly
To drink the honey wine ;—
To drink the honey wine, my dear,
And sup celestial air,
And dance as the young angels dance,—
Ah, God, that I were there !

1922

¹ From *Midwinter*.

Avignon

1759

*Hearts to break but nane to sell,
Gear to tine but nane to hain ;—
We maun dree a weary spell
Ere our lad comes back again.*

I WALK abroad on winter days,
When storms have stripped the wide champaign,
For northern winds have norland ways,
And scents of Badenoch haunt the rain.
And by the lipping river path,
When in the fog the Rhone runs grey,
I see the heather of the strath,
And watch the salmon leap in Spey.

The hills are feathered with young trees,—
I set them for my children's boys.
I made a garden deep in ease,
A pleasance for my lady's joys.

Strangers have heired them. Long ago
She died,—kind fortune thus to die ;
And my one son by Beauly flow
Gave up the soul that could not lie.

Old, elbow-worn, and pinched I bide
The final toll the gods may take.
The laggard years have quenched my pride ;
They cannot kill the ache, the ache.
Weep not the dead, for they have sleep
Who lie at home ; but ah, for me
In the deep grave my heart will weep
With longing for my lost countrie.

*Hearts to break but nane to sell,
Gear to tine but nane to hain ;—
We maun dree a weary spell
Ere our lad comes back again.*

1911

The Gipsy's Song to the Lady Cassilis

"Whereupon the Faas, coming down from the Gates of Galloway,
did so bewitch my lady that she forgat husband and kin,
and followed the tinkler's piping."—Chap-book of the *Raid
of Cassilis.*

THE door is open to the wall,
The air is bright and free ;
Adown the stair, across the hall,
And then—the world and me ;
The bare grey bent, the running stream,
The fire beside the shore ;
And we will bid the hearth farewell,
And never seek it more,
My love,
And never seek it more.

And you shall wear no silken gown,
No maid shall bind your hair ;
The yellow broom shall be your gem
Your braid the heather rare.
Athwart the moor, adown the hill,
Across the world away ;

The path is long for happy hearts
That sing to greet the day,
My love,
That sing to greet the day.

When morning cleaves the eastern grey,
And the lone hills are red ;
When sunsets light the evening way
And birds are quieted ;
In autumn noon and springtide dawn,
By hill and dale and sea,
The world shall sing its ancient song
Of hope and joy for thee,
My love,
Of hope and joy for thee.

And at the last no solemn stole
Shall on thy breast be laid ;
No mumbling priest shall speed thy soul,
No charnel vault thee shade.
But by the shadowed hazel copse,
Aneath the greenwood tree,
Where airs are soft and waters sing,
Thou'l sleep by me,
My love,
Thou'l sleep by me.

1898

Wood Magic

(9th Century)

I WILL walk warily in the wise woods on the fringes of
eventide,

For the covert is full of noises and the stir of nameless
things.

I have seen in the dusk of the beeches the shapes of the
lords that ride,

And down in the marish hollow I have heard the lady
who sings.

And once in an April gloaming I met a maid on the sward,
All marble-white and gleaming and tender and wild of
eye ;—

I, Jehan the hunter, who speak am a grown man, middling
hard,

But I dreamt a month of the maid, and wept I knew
not why.

Down by the edge of the firs, in a coppice of heath and
vine,

Is an old moss-grown altar, shaded by briar and bloom,

Denys, the priest, hath told me 'twas the lord Apollo's
shrine

In the days ere Christ came down from God to the
Virgin's womb.

I never go past but I doff my cap and avert my eyes—
(Were Denys to catch me I trow I'd do penance for
half a year.)—

For once I saw a flame there and the smoke of a sacrifice,
And a voice spake out of the thicket that froze my soul
with fear.

Wherefore to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,
Mary the Blessed Mother, and the kindly Saints as well,
I will give glory and praise, and them I cherish the most,
For they have the keys of Heaven, and save the soul
from Hell.

But likewise I will spare for the lord Apollo a grace,
And a bow for the lady Venus—as a friend but not as
a thrall.

'Tis true they are out of Heaven, but some day they may
win the place;

For gods are kittle cattle, and a wise man honours them
all.

1911

Plain Folk

SINCE flaming angels drove our sire
From Eden's green to walk the mire,
We are the folk that tilled the plot
And ground the grain and boiled the pot.
We hung the garden terraces
That pleased Queen Semiramis.
Our toil it was and burdened brain
That set the Pyramids o'er the plain.
We marched from Egypt at God's call
And drilled the ranks and fed them all,
But never Eshcol's wine drank we—
Our bones lay 'twixt the sand and sea.
We officered the brazen bands
That rode the far and desert lands ;
We bore the Roman eagles forth
And made great roads from south to north ;
White cities flowered for holiday,
But we, forgot, died far away.
And when the Lord called folk to Him,
And some sat blissful at His feet,
Ours was the task the bowl to brim,
For on this earth even saints must eat.

The serfs have little need to think,
Only to work and sleep and drink ;
A rover's life is boyish play,
For when cares press he rides away ;
The king sits on his ruby throne,
And calls the whole wide world his own.
But we, the plain folk, noon and night
No surcease of our toil we see ;
We cannot ease our cares by flight,
For Fortune holds our loves in fee.
We are not slaves to sell our wills,
We are not kings to ride the hills,
But patient men who jog and dance
In the dull wake of circumstance ;
Loving our little patch of sun,
Too weak our homely dues to shun,
Too nice of conscience, or too free,
To prate of rights—if rights there be.

The Scriptures tell us that the meek
The earth shall have to work their will ;
It may be they shall find who seek,
When they have topped the last long hill.
Meantime we serve among the dust
For at the best a broken crust,
A word of praise, and now and then
The joy of turning home again,
But freemen still we fall or stand,
We serve because our hearts command.
Though kings may boast and knights cavort,

We broke the spears at Agincourt.
When odds were wild and hopes were down,
We died in droves by Leipsic town.
Never a field was starkly won
But *ours* the dead that faced the sun.
The slave will fight because he must,
The rover for his ire and lust,
The king to pass an idle hour
Or feast his fatted heart with power ;
But we, because we choose, we choose,
Nothing to gain and much to lose,
Holding it happier far to die
Than falter in our decency.

The serfs may know an hour of pride
When the high flames of tumult ride.
The rover has his days of ease
When he has sacked his palaces.
A king may live a year like God
When prostrate peoples drape the sod.
We ask for little,—leave to tend
Our modest fields : at daylight's end
The fires of home : a wife's caress :
The star of children's happiness.
Vain hope ! 'Tis ours for ever and aye
To do the job the slaves have marred,
To clear the wreckage of the fray,
And please our kings by working hard.
Daily we mend their blunderings,
Swashbucklers, demagogues, and kings !

What if we rose ?—If some fine morn,
Unnumbered as the autumn corn,
With all the brains and all the skill
Of stubborn back and steadfast will,
We rose and, with the guns in train,
Proposed to deal the cards again,
And, tired of sitting up o' nights,
Gave notice to our parasites,
Announcing that in future they
Who paid the piper should call the lay ?
Then crowns would tumble down like nuts,
And wastrels hide in water-butts ;
Each lamp-post as an epilogue
Would hold a pendent demagogue.
Then would the world be for the wise.
•
But ah ! the plain folk never rise.—

1911

Stocks and Stones

The Chief Topiawari replies to Sir Walter Raleigh, who upbraided him for idol worship.

MY gods, you say, are idols dumb,
Which men have wrought from wood or clay,
Carven with chisel, shaped with thumb,
A morning's task, an evening's play.
You bid me turn my face on high
Where the blue heaven the sun enthrones,
And serve a viewless deity,
Nor make my bow to stocks and stones.

My lord, I am not skilled in wit,
Nor wise in priestcraft, but I know
That fear to man is spur and bit
To jog and curb his fancies' flow.
He fears and loves, for love and awe
In mortal souls may well unite
To fashion forth the perfect law
Where Duty takes to wife Delight.

But on each man *one* Fear awaits
And chills his marrow like the dead.—
He cannot worship what he hates
Or make a god of naked Dread.

The homeless winds that twist and race,
The heights of cloud that veer and roll,
The unplumb'd Abyss, the drift of Space—
These are the fears that drain the soul.

Ye dauntless ones from out the sea
Fear nought. Perchance your gods are strong
To rule the air where grim things be,
And quell the deeps with all their throng.
For me, I dread not fire nor steel,
Nor aught that walks in open light,
But fend me from the endless Wheel,
The voids of Space, the gulfs of Night.

Wherefore my brittle gods I make
Of friendly clay and kindly stone,—
Wrought with my hands, to serve or break,
From crown to toe my work, my own.
My eyes can see, my nose can smell,
My fingers touch their painted face ;
They weave their little homely spell
To warm me from the cold of Space.

My gods are wrought of common stuff
For human joys and mortal tears ;
Weakly, perchance, yet staunch enough
To build a barrier 'gainst my fears,
Where, lowly but secure, I wait
And hear without the strange winds blow.—
I cannot worship what I hate,
Or serve a god I dare not know.

Babylon

The Song of Nehemiah's Workmen.

HOW many miles to Babylon ?
Three score and ten.

Can I get there by candle-light ?
Yes, and back again.

We are come back from Babylon,
Out of the plains and the glare,
To the little hills of our own country
And the sting of our kindred air ;
To the ruckle of stones on the red rock's edge
Which Kedron cleaves like a sword.
We will build the walls of Zion again,
To the glory of Zion's Lord.

Now is no more of dalliance
By the reedy waters in Spring,
When we sang of home, and sighed, and dreamed,
And wept on remembering.
Now we are back in our ancient hills
Out of the plains and the sun ;
But before we make it a dwelling-place
There's a wonderful lot to be done.

The walls are to build from west to east,
From Gihon to Olivet,
Waters to lead and wells to clear,
And the garden furrows to set.
From the Sheep Gate to the Fish Gate
Is a welter of mire and mess ;
And southward over the common lands
Is a dragon's wilderness.

The Courts of the Lord are a heap of dust
Where the hill winds whistle and race,
And the noble pillars of God His House
Stand in a ruined place.
In the Holy of Holies foxes lair,
And owls and night-birds build.
There's a deal to do ere we patch it anew
As our father Solomon willed.

Now is the day of the ordered life
And the law which all obey.
We toil by rote and speak by note
And never a soul dare stray.
Ever among us a lean old man
Keepeth his watch and ward,
Crying, " The Lord hath set you free ;
Prepare ye the way of the Lord."

A goodly task we are called unto,
A task to dream on o' nights,—
Work for Judah and Judah's God,
Setting our land to rights ;

Everything fair and all things square
And straight as a plummet string.—
Is it mortal guile, if once in a while
Our thoughts go wandering? . . .

We were not slaves in Babylon,
For the gate of our souls lay free,
There in that vast and sunlit land
On the edges of mystery.
Daily we wrought and daily we thought,
And we chafed not at rod and power,
For Sinim, Sabaea, and dusky Hind
Talked to us hour by hour.

The man who lives in Babylon
May poorly sup and fare,
But loves and lures from the ends of the earth
Beckon him everywhere.
Next year he too may have sailed strange seas
And conquered a diadem;
For kings are as common in Babylon
As crows in Bethlehem.

Here we are bound to the common round
In a land which knows not change.
Nothing befalleth to stir the blood
Or quicken the heart to range;
Never a hope that we cannot plumb
Or a stranger visage in sight,—
At the most a sleek Samaritan
Or a ragged Amorite.

Here we are sober and staid of soul
Working beneath the law,
Settled amid our fathers' dust,
Seeing the hills they saw.
All things fixed and determinate,
Chiselled and squared by rule.—
Is it mortal guile once in a while
To try to escape from school ?

We will go back to Babylon,
Silently one by one,
Out from the hills and the laggard brooks
To the streams that brim in the sun.
Only a moment, Lord, we crave,
To breathe and listen and see.—
Then we start anew with muscle and thew
To hammer trestles for Thee.

1911

The Song of the Sea Captain

Diego d'Alboquerque, brother of the great Affonso, a knight of the Portuguese Order of Jesus Christ, having landed on the coast north of Zanzibar, wandered to the Abyssinian highlands, where he saw and loved Prester John's daughter, Melissa, a cousin of the Lady of Tripoli (*La Princesse Lointaine*). He was slain off Goa in the great fight with the Sultan of Muscat.

I SAIL a lone sea captain
 Around the southern seas ;
Worn as my cheek, the flag of Christ
 Floats o'er me on the breeze.
By green isle and by desert,
 By little white-walled town,
To west wind and to east wind
 I lead my galleons down.

I know the black south-easter,
 I know the drowsy calms
When the slow tide creeps shoreward
 To lave the idle palms.
Of many a stark sea battle
 The Muslim foe can tell,
When their dark dhows I sent to crabs
 And their dark souls to hell.

Small reck have I of Muslim,
 Small reck of winds and seas,
The waters are my pathway
 To bring me to my ease.
The dawns that burn above me
 Are torches set to light
My footsteps to a garden
 Of roses red and white.

• • • • •

Five months we stood from Lagos,
 While, scant of food and sleep,
We tracked da Gama's highroad
 Across the Guinea deep.
All spent we were with watching
 When, ghostly as a dream,
The Bona Esperanza cape
 Rose dark upon the beam.

Then by the low green inlets
 We groped our passage forth,
Outside the shallow surf-bars
 We headed for the north.
Sofala gave us victual,
 Inyaka ease and rest,
But of the wayside harbours
 I loved Melinda best.

*Twas on a day in April,
 The Feast of Rosaly,

We beached our weary vessels,
Cried farewell to the sea,
And with ten stout companions
And hearts with youth made bold
We sought the inland mountains
Of which our fathers told.

No chart had we or counsel
To guide our weary feet,
To north and west we wandered
In drought and dust and heat,
Till o'er the steaming tree-tops
We saw the far-off dome
Of mystic icy mountains,
And knew the Prester's home.

Nine days we climb the foothills,
Nine days the mountain wall,
Sheer cliff and ancient forest
And fretted waterfall ;
And on the tenth we entered
A meadow cool and deep,
And in the Prester's garden
We laid us down to sleep.

Long time we fared like princes
In palaces of stone,
For never guest goes cheerless
Who meets with Prester John :

Where woodlands mount to gardens
And gardens climb to snows
And wells of living water
Sing rondels to the rose.

And there among the roses,
More white and red than they,
There walked the gleaming lady,
The princess far away.
Dearer her golden tresses
Than the high pomp of wars,
And deep and still her eyes as lakes
That brood beneath the stars.

There walked we and there spoke we
Of things that may not cease,
Of life and death and God's dear love
And the eternal peace.
For in that shadowed garden
The world had grown so small
That one white girl in one white hand
Could clasp and hold it all.

I craved the Prester's blessing,
I kissed his kingly hand :
“ Too soon has come the parting
From this fair mountain land.

But shame it were for Christian knight
To take his leisure here
When o'er the broad and goodly earth
The Muslim sends his fear.

“ I go to gird my sword on,
To drive my fleets afar,
To court the wrath of tempests,
The dusty toils of war.
But when my vows are ended,
Then, joyous from the fray,
I come to claim my lady,
The princess far away.”

• • • • •

I sail a lone sea captain
Across the southern seas ;
Worn as my cheek, the flag of Christ
Still flaunts upon the breeze.
By green isle and by desert,
By little white-walled town,
To west wind and to east wind
I lead my galleons down.

But in the starkerest tempest,
And in the drowsy heats,
Where on the shattered coral
The far-drawn breaker beats :

In seas of dreaming water,
And in the wind-swept spray,
I see my snow-white lady,
The princess far away.

Sometimes in inland places
We march for weary days,
Where thorns parch in the noontide
Or fens are dark with haze ;—
For me 'tis but a march of dreams,
For ever, clear and low,
I hear cool waters falling
In the garden of the snow.

Small reck have I of Muslim,
Small reck of sands or seas ;
The wide world is my pathway
To lead me to my ease.
The dawns that burn above me
Are torches set to light
My footsteps to a garden
Of roses red and white.

1905

•

Antiphilus of Byzantium

Anth. Pal. ix. 546.

GIVE me a mat on the deck,
When the awnings sound to the blows of the spray,
And the hearthstones crack with the flames a-back
 And the pot goes bubbling away.
Give me a boy to cook my broth ;
 For table a ship's plank lacking a cloth,
 And never a fork or knife ;
And, after a game with a rusty pack,
The bo'sun's whistle to pipe us back—
 That's the fortune fit for a king,
 For Oh ! I love common life !

1895

* * *

An Echo of Meleager

SCORN not my love, proud child. The summers wane.
Long ere the topmost mountain snows have gone
The Spring is flitting; 'neath the April rain
For one brief day flowers laugh on Helicon.
The breeze that fans thy honeyed cheek this noon
To-morrow will be blasts that scourge the main,
And youth and joy and laughter fleet too soon.—
Scorn not my love, proud child. The summers wane.

To-day the rose blooms by the garden plot,
The swallows twitter 'neath the Parian dome;
But soon the roses fall and lie forgot,
And soon the swallows will be turning home.
Tempt not the arrows of the Cyprian's eye,
Vex not the god that will not brook disdain;—
Love is the port to which the wise barks fly.
Scorn not my love, proud child. The summers wane.

1910

•

Oxford Prologizes¹

WELCOME I give you, gentles all,
Who honour this, my carnival ;
For mine the prose and mine the rhymes,
Mine the choragus and the mimes,
And not a word that's said or sung
But springs from Oxford pen or tongue.

From that first day when men descried
The double path o'er Isis' tide
And set a city by the fords,
Through the dark wars of books and swords,
I fenced a little citadel
Where might the gentler Muses dwell.
And not alone Athene reigned
Among my towers ; Artemis deigned
To lead her dance ; my youthful quire
Has heard Apollo tune his lyre ;
Through tributary hamlets ran
The piping of the rustic Pan ;

¹ Lines spoken by Miss Lilian Braithwaite at a *matinée* in aid of the Oxford Preservation Trust at the Haymarket Theatre, February 25, 1930.

By Fyfield elm and Bampton plain
The morris-dancers wove their chain,
And masques with lute and virginal
Have greeted kings in Christ Church hall.
Though changed the times, the comic boot
Yet treads my boards ; Euterpe's flute
Sounds still for chosen lass and lad,
And, when the bonfire lights the quad,
With flying hair the orgiast raves,
The cymbals clash, the thyrsus waves.

This day a graver purpose runs
Through these the revels of my sons.
'Tis not to grace some holy day,
Or band my young in summer play,
Or loose from Cardinal's purse the string,
Or win a smile from wandering King,
But ye, my children, far and wide,
To call confederate to my side,
For the old love, for the old pride.

Where once the modest pilgrim strode,
Immodest myriads throng my road,
Not borne on horse or foot, but such
As nurse the inviolable clutch,
Devour the steep and scour the lea
With onward impulse all too free.
The rawest rufous cabins rise
Above my shy fritillaries ;
My secret hills are cloven and scarred,

And narrower grows my zone of sward.
Wherefore, despoiled, I make my prayer
For succour to my children ere
Some dunce, not Scotus, fling his net
Of drab o'er my green coronet.

For centuries seven my questing sons
I drew by every road that runs.
Rough were the paths they paced of old,
The miry track by heath and wold.
By forest wilds and swollen streams,
In winter snows and April gleams.
They begged their bread and paid their score
With trifles from the Muses' store,
In many a wayside hostelry
With Peter Turph and Stephen Sly.
But, whether on weary feet they came,
By laggard coach, by rail or car,
From fields of home, from lands afar,
My guerdon was for each the same.
I gave them youth's divine surmise
Mirrored in my eternal eyes ;
I gave them for a sanctuary
My cloisters, where enchantments lie
Unbroken since the Golden Age ;
And, for an ampler heritage,
Green neighbour fields and quiet rills
Cradled by soft, deep-bosomed hills.
I gave them spell of antique arts,
And ancient dreams of seeking hearts.

And, as a panoply for strife,
Whate'er the sages taught of life.
But most I gave them loyalties,
The soul to dare, the wing to rise,
The dear companionships of youth,
And the clear eye that welcomes truth.

They came from far ; farther they fared.
Whate'er man's venturous heart has dared,
So dared my sons ; in toil and dearth
They blazed the untrodden trails of earth,
Harnessed the flood and tilled the sands,
Set gardens in the desert lands.
They freed the slave, and raised the mean.
And curbed the lawless, and made clean
The heart of darkness.

On the grave

Of such no English grasses wave ;
Ganges and Nile, not Isis, keep
A vigil o'er their timeless sleep.
But in their toils they nursed apart,
Deep in the treasury of the heart,
The thought of me, a charm to bless,
A palm-tree in the wilderness.
They saw beyond the sand dunes gleam
The summer deeps of Hinksey stream.
And breathed, when swamps lay dank and still,
An April wind on Cumnor hill.

*Esto perpetua ! This my plea
To all whose hearts are vowed to me.*

My sons out of the world I draw,
And mould them to my gentle law,
And send them back to play their part
In court and senate, field and mart,
For ever mine, if once they hear
My secret whispered in their ear.
But for such task I needs must dwell
Out of the strife, a citadel
With warders at the outer gate,
A place enclosed, inviolate.
So may I in its purity
Preserve the truth that maketh free
From taint of narrow loss and gain ;
So may my children still be fain
To hallow with their dreams my town,
The Tripled as the Violet Crown ;
And, like the wise of old, to see
Some bloom of immortality
In the dear ways their youth has trod—
City of Cecrops—City of God.

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